

National Heritage Areas: Fostering a Research Agenda

**A workshop hosted by the
University of Pennsylvania School of Architecture
during the George Wright Society Conference, Philadelphia, PA**

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Background on the Workshop

Context

National Heritage Areas: Fostering a Research Agenda is the third in an on-going series of workshops to assess the state of heritage area research and identify research needs. The workshop was held during the 2005 George Wright Society (GWS) Conference, and followed a panel presentation by four advanced-degree-seeking students who presented papers on their research in heritage areas. At the workshop, which was hosted by the School of Design at University of Pennsylvania, scholars, students and practitioners reflected on the panel presentations and discussed additional research needed to understand the process and impacts of heritage development.

In contrast with the first two workshops, in which representatives of federal agencies and organizations that use and support research discussed the kinds of research to advocate and facilitate, this workshop was comprised of those engaged in or considering engaging in research. Therefore, the discussion centered on gaps that participants have identified in the current body research.

At the second forum in Pittsburgh, PA in 2003, Adrian Phillips, Vice Chair for World Heritage of the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) of International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), proposed a flow diagram to illustrate the cyclical nature of research as it informs practice. In two years, the body of research has expanded both in depth and breath. Some of the research being conducted has been shaped by previous research discussions, which are posted on the internet. The research is also evolving in complexity to address qualitative aspects of the process and outcomes of heritage development. The discussion at the Philadelphia workshop was loosely organized around Philips' research agenda diagram, but did not address specific components of the model. However, the dialog confirmed and added specificity to the model, which by its very nature must remain fluid in order to accurately reflect evolving and emerging heritage area research needs.

An Introduction to Current Heritage Area Research

People, Places, and Parks ~ 2005 George Wright Society Biennial Conference

Session Abstract

National Heritage Areas I: Current Research into their Social Meaning, Policy Evaluation, Qualitative Indicators and Future Management Models

As interest in creating new national heritage areas and extending existing areas grows, the program is under pressure to demonstrate its value in conserving traditional communities, to develop measurable indicators, and to build a body of theory and practice. This panel highlights current research from a variety of disciplines that showcases the diversity of the heritage area movement and provides the first steps in evaluating these complex regional conservation strategies; and provides a stronger foundation on which to develop future National Park Service policy. The work in the Blackstone National Heritage Area and in the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area tests an evaluative approach that seeks to understand the impact of heritage areas on the quality of life of designated regions. The work in the Northern Rio Grande in New Mexico and the Mississippi Delta looks at the role heritage plays in engaging residents and managing the future community and economic development of diverse communities.

~ for more information, visit www.georgewright.org

Prior to the workshop, many participants attended a panel session at the George Wright Society Conference to hear about research being conducted on Social Meaning, Policy Evaluation, Qualitative Indicators and Future Management Models in heritage areas. John Cosgrove, Executive Director of the Alliance of National Heritage Areas, provided a practitioner's perspective on the value of the research in the field.

Abstracts of the morning's panel presentations are available on the National Park Service National Heritage Areas website at www.cr.nps.gov/heritageareas/research.htm. The research will be published in a volume of post-conference proceedings in 2005

that can be ordered via the George Wright Society website at www.georgewright.org.

Fostering a Heritage Areas Research Agenda: Proceedings of the Meeting

Introduction

Brenda Barrett, National Coordinator of Heritage Areas at the National Park Service, and Randy Mason, Associate Professor in the School of Architecture at University of Pennsylvania, welcomed participants and summarized the findings of discussions from the previous workshops. They noted that increasing interest in heritage areas research requires such periodic heritage area research discussions to reflect on progress and explore ways of advancing the research agenda further.

Competing Interests in Heritage Area Research

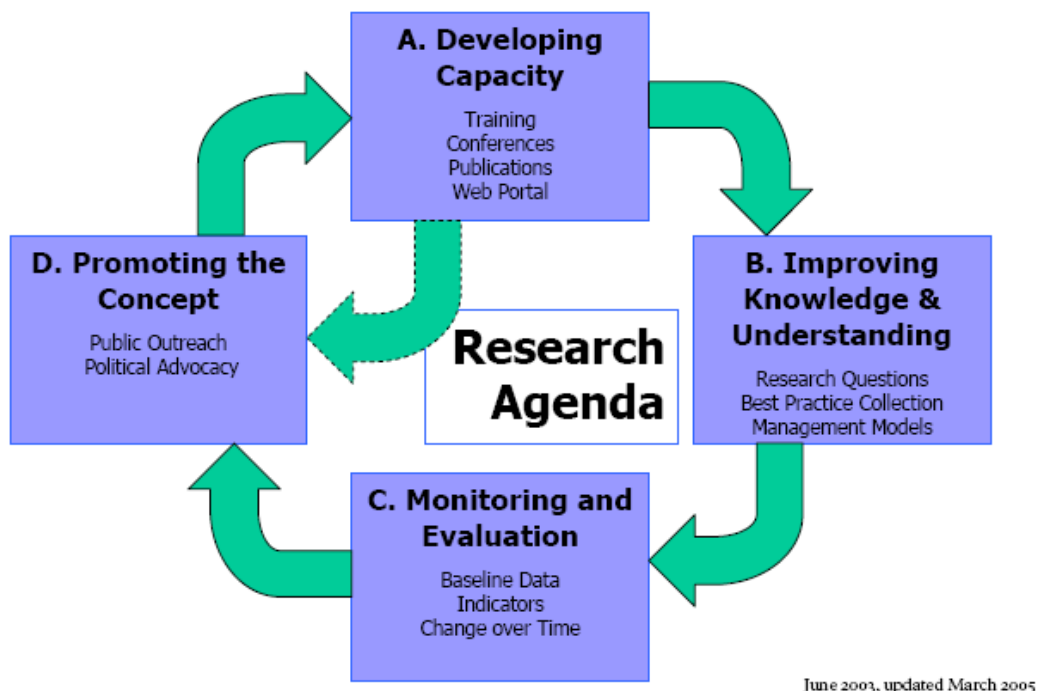
The afternoon began with a discussion of the competing interests and audiences that add complexity to heritage area research. The interests of academia and practitioners compete, as practitioners generally look for research that advocates and the academic community seeks objectivity. The breadth of the research needed to serve the heritage area community also complicates the process of prioritizing or sequencing items on a research agenda as does the need to do research both across heritage areas and within individual heritage areas. Innovation is likely to be found in local initiatives that percolate up rather than drip down from a national entity, but research that looks at multiple areas can inform national heritage policy.

Another tension exists between those seeking to argue the economic benefits of heritage development and those more focused on the non-economic impacts. The debate over whether economic or quality of life measures should drive heritage development has surfaced throughout each workshop discussion. Quality of life issues that motivate heritage development include loss of landscape, loss of community, and degradation of biodiversity. Heritage tourism, for example, often touted for its positive economic

impacts, benefits communities in some ways but does not necessarily improve quality of life or community vitality, unless it is carefully monitored and managed. The economic impact data can itself be misleading, because while economic impact studies measure overall money generation, they do not necessarily measure how much is retained locally. For example, if tourists are buying souvenirs made in Japan, film at Walmart, and lunch at McDonald's, a major portion of those tourist dollars is leaving the local economy.

A related conflict exists between the actual and perceived value of quantitative over qualitative evaluation. Researchers and practitioners are questioning whether the quantitative indicators most commonly collected related to visitation, economic impact, and resource conservation accurately reflect heritage development outcomes. Studies based on qualitative data collection and analysis related to changing perceptions and social capacity could more accurately reflect the real impacts of heritage development.

Philips' flow diagram, illustrated below, is a useful tool to organize the group's most recent conversation about research agenda needs. The diagram has been updated to reflect the idea that research and evaluation and promotion and capacity inform and reinforce one another.



A. Building on Existing Resources ~ Developing Capacity

What existing resources could be made more readily available and accessible across disciplines?

Resources are already in place upon which to further advance and promote research. For example, an interdisciplinary bibliography of resources useful to heritage areas should be compiled from a number of existing but less detailed bibliographies. This bibliography could guide a colloquium on the included materials and topic areas.

Examples of best practices should be gathered, described in writing, and be made readily available.

International management models and relevant case studies (e.g. Greenways in Central Europe)

should be collected and made readily available.

A leadership forum can foster organizational capacity building within existing and emerging areas.

Developing Capacity

- A synthetic, interdisciplinary “bibliography” drawing across disciplines and fields (e.g., political science, business, arts, ecosystems, health)
- Colloquium on above
- Leadership forum on developing capacity
- Study tours and exchanges
- Align research interests with existing practitioner organizations such as the Alliance of National Heritage Areas
- Build upon concepts used in NPS Conservation Study Institute Atlas project
- Utilize National Trust Rural Development Initiative as an opportunity to test proposed criteria
- Build upon and refine existing institutional evaluation methods and models

impacts of heritage areas, tested for their suitability, and refined as needed. A compendium of case studies and information and a central location for this information is yet to be created. Suggested comparative analyses that could build upon this information range from cross-comparisons of organizational types and heritage area management entities to comparisons of recreational corridors in the United States and internationally. The results should be broadly distributed.

In addition to gathering and organizing project and program-specific examples and information, surveying is also a useful technique to collect the information needed to evaluate success, impacts and outcomes. Surveys could be used to identify differences in perceptions, values and expectations among young and old, ethnic groups, urban and rural populations in a heritage area. Active and non-participating residents in heritage area work could be surveyed; similarly, it would be useful to collect information from those who have remained within the heritage area and those that have emigrated. Surveying could also be used to identify the qualities of communities that matter most to people and how values vary across heritage regions and the rest of the country.

B. What Next? ~ Improving Knowledge and Understanding

Two streams of research needs resounded most notably from the discussion—success and efficiency. Both require and will greatly benefit from comprehensive information gathering and organization.

There need to be measures of success developed for individual areas and the areas collectively. These measures could be based on the identification and evaluation of a compendium of success stories, best practices, and survey data within and across heritage areas. Measures developed should then be used to evaluate the

Improving Knowledge and Understanding

- Information Collection: Surveys
 - Survey non-stakeholders in the community
 - Survey high school reunion classes to compare those that stayed in the community versus those who left
 - Survey quality of life factors in communities and how they vary from place to place
 - Revisit questions in five years to see change over time and study impacts
- Continually refine questions based on evaluation
- Gather models and best practices
- Document the economics of heritage products (local foods and crafts)
- Gather partnership “success” stories

C. Refining Research Needs~ Monitoring and Evaluation

What kinds of research needs were identified by the group?

The group discussed the need to identify the existing organizational capacities of heritage areas and run cross-case comparisons of effectiveness. Evaluating “lessons learned” provides opportunities to learn from projects or components that didn’t work or could have worked better. The group felt that it might

be valuable to apply existing research in other fields on institutional evaluation (to include non-governmental organizations, local governments, and Federal commissions) to heritage area organizational structures and management entities.

It may be useful to identify how much local communities retain and profit from heritage area initiatives. Local business development in heritage areas could be used as a measure of local retention.

Quantitative measures of success, especially economic success, are important but there is also a need to identify credible non-economic quantitative and qualitative measures. Measuring the retention of young people and educated people in communities reflects both economic and non-economic success. Similarly, measures that capture increases in social capital, such as local newspaper readership, membership in civic organizations, and voter participation might be used to demonstrate heritage area success.

Evaluation criteria be developed to measure success in rural heritage areas specifically. Research to develop a set of standardized criteria that could be used across heritage areas to measure success would also be very useful. Developing and measuring 'success' with a common set of criteria across heritage areas would be particularly valuable to the National Park Service (NPS). Developing simple performance measures to evaluate success could be useful and perhaps critical to continued political enthusiasm for the heritage area movement.

Measuring and Evaluation

- Indicators: based on information gathered, refine and evaluate:
 - Quantitative indicators of “process”
 - Quantitative impacts
 - Non-economic qualitative impacts
 - “Brain drain” and “youth drain” before and following designation
 - Social capital indicators – e.g. readership of newspapers, civic participation, longitudinal baseline data collection
 - Measurement tools to quantify/qualify the level of success/ satisfaction perceived by residents and stakeholders
 - Money being kept in the economy–(e.g. through local business development, local foods and products)
- Comparative Analysis
 - Compare NPS and non-NPS models, best practices and successes
 - Compare managing entities in bureaucracies and non-government organizations, local governments and characterize what works
 - Compare international management models such as Greenways in central Europe
 - Document and compare cultural differences/ perceptions--urban/rural, generational, ethnic-- within and outside heritage areas
- Evaluation criteria
 - Develop and test evaluation criteria and models or frameworks

D. Why Research? ~ Promoting the Concept

Promoting the Concept ~ Answering Questions about Heritage Areas

- Do heritage areas effectively address diversity, civic engagement, and inclusiveness?
- What makes heritage real for people? What brings people together?
- When is the most appropriate time to designate an area?
- Does NPS involvement add value e.g. increase other organization involvement?
- How do we make the heritage area strategy more mainstream to NPS?
- Is environmental and ecosystem recreation a “gateway” into heritage?
- Is heritage an effective bio-social system development and management tool?
- What is the role of place-based education?
- How much time is enough to affect change?

What value does research add to our understanding of how heritage areas work?

Participants believe that heritage areas provide a sound venue for building bridges between advocacy groups (e.g. environmentalist, businessmen, preservationists, outdoor recreation enthusiasts) and grow the participation in affairs within the boundaries of the heritage area. Is this really the case?

Participants view heritage areas as effective mechanisms for improving quality of life. There was though also recognition that developing convincing methodologies for measuring success presented researchers with a large challenge.

What kind of research reveals the impacts of heritage areas on quality of life?

Many in the group view preservation of the environment, biodiversity, and an unspoiled ecosystem as an integral component of economic development and not a barrier to it. Ecosystem recreation combines good stewardship with sustainable economic development. Research may be able to highlight the links between recreation, stewardship, conservation, and economic development.

The group agreed that heritage areas can provide a framework for communities to preserve what they value from the past and make it a part of future success. Sustainability of the local economy resonated throughout the afternoon discussion. There cannot be long-term success without economic viability.

For more information

Research agenda forums are held every one to two years as opportunity permits. The proceedings of prior forums and announcements about future forums are on the NPS National Heritage Areas website at www.cr.nps.gov/heritageareas/research.htm. For more information on the national heritage areas, visit the National Park Service National Heritage Areas website at www.cr.nps.gov/heritageareas/. The website provides links to the websites of its partners, the 27 national heritage areas, additional research tools and tools for heritage area development.

Participants in Research Forum III at the University of Pennsylvania

Andrew Gorski	University of Arizona
Bonnie Halda	National Park Service
Brenda Barrett	NPS National Heritage Areas
Cory Kegerise	Schuykill River National Heritage Area
Crystal Fortwangler	University of Michigan
Daniel Laven	University of Vermont
Duncan Hilchey	Cornell University
Hannah Blake	Erie Canalway NHC
Jackie Tuxill	NPS Conservation Study Institute
Jessica Brown	Quebec-Labrador Foundation
Judy Spade	West Virginia University
Kristin Peppel	The Conservation Fund
Kurt Zwikl	Schuykill River National Heritage Area
Linda Kikunaga	University of Pennsylvania
Linda Seifert	National Park Service
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Michael Creasey	Lowell National Historical Park
Molly Levin	University of Maryland
Nora Mitchell	NPS Conservation Study Institute
Peter Samuel	National Park Service
Phyllis ellin	National Park Service
Randy Mason	University of Pennsylvania
Rolando Herts	Rutgers University
Sue Martin-Williams	West Virginia University
Suzanne Copping	National Park Service
Tom Guthrie	University of Chicago
Toni Lee	NPS Special Projects

The Research Priorities of the National Park Service National Heritage Areas are to foster:

1. Definitions of “success” and “sustainability” in national heritage areas,
2. A body of cases studies that articulates successful and sustainable management frameworks and practices, critical components of success, and benchmarks of sustainability,
3. Indicators to monitor and measure heritage area maturation, success, and sustainability,
4. An international network of researchers and practitioners that supports the ongoing discussion, development and dissemination of research, resources, and opportunities, and
5. Consistent and high-quality heritage development practice through the proliferation of training, networking, information exchange and resource sharing opportunities.